

25. HOUSE CROW *CORVUS SPLENDENS* VIEILLOT
FEEDING ON MIDGES

On June 24, 1999 at around 1830 hrs while walking along the embankment of the Hussain Sagar lake (constructed in 1660-70, in the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad to supply drinking water to the people during the reign of Ibrahim Qutub Shah), we observed unusually large swarms of the midge *Kiefferulus* spp. (Diptera: Chironomidae) everywhere along the lake bed. Interestingly, about 12-15 house crows (*Corvus splendens splendens*) were seen feeding voraciously on these insects, pecking at them one by one from the pavements. Within a minute, the crows had consumed about 140 insects. Even though it was dusk, the crows continued to feed till 1915 hrs.

The house crow is a known scavenger and takes practically everything that can be eaten. Ali and Ripley (1983) recorded many insects including winged termites, grasshoppers, beetles, ants and moth larvae in their diet. But nowhere have midges been reported on their menu.

Chironomids are well known as bioindicators of water quality. The larvae or blood worms were commonly reported from Hussain Sagar (Chandrasekhar 1998). They play a primary role in accumulation and transmission of contaminants in the eutrophic lake. Chironomid larvae function at a fundamental level in the aquatic food chain as the natural diet for fish, diving ducks and for other aquatic insects.

Despite their non-biting habit, the midges are reported to be involved in human allergic diseases causing bronchial asthma, conjunctivitis, hay fever, seasonal rhinitis and skin hypersensitivity. The midge larvae may often serve as mechanical carriers of pathogens from polluted water, e.g. *Legionella* causes bronchopneumonia in humans (Chaudhari and Chattopadhyay 1997). Apart from these health hazards, the swarms are a nuisance to two wheeler traffic. A very large roost of house crows was seen near the lake on a tamarind tree. The good lighting and availability of easy prey provided these flying municipal workers to operate during twilight hours.

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